

A
FEW WORDS
ON
C O R N
AND
QUAKERS.

By ROBERT HOWARD.

AUDI ET ALTERAM PARTEM.

Motto at Guildhall.

Let all impartially be tried :

Then hear, what's said on t'other side.

FOURTH EDITION, WITH NOTES.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED AND SOLD BY WILLIAM PHILLIPS,
GEORGE YARD, LOMBARD STREET.

1800.

Price 3d. or 2s. 6d. per Dozen.



A

FEW WORDS, &c.

RUMOURS have been circulated of late with uncommon industry, insinuating that the Quakers are Monopolizers of Corn, and that therefore the high price of Corn is owing to the Quakers: a very short, though bold, assertion, and a natural conclusion drawn from it; but if the premises should happen to prove false, the conclusion must fall with them.

Such a charge thus generally made, without any fact or person being produced, is evidently difficult to be answered, and for that reason has remained unnoticed. Indeed many have thought it, and still think it, too extravagant to be noticed. I confess I am of another opinion, and think, that he who takes from me my good name, does me a

very great injury. Besides, there are many to whom these stories are told, who are not willing to give them credit, and who will be glad of an authority to contradict them.

I should not perhaps have stood forward in this manner, if, besides my share of unjust insult, I had not been singled out by the following report :

A shopkeeper in Lower Street, Islington, has reported, that the warehouses of myself and my partners are stored with many hundred sacks of wheat and flour, laid by for a high price ; and this story too was nicely made up, with saying, that he knew Mr. Howard was a charitable good sort of man, and that he would not have believed this of him, but that Mr. Howard made no secret of it. On the same day that I heard this, I was told of a woman in the Willow-walk, Shoreditch, who had related nearly the same thing. When I saw her, she frankly told me, it was talked of among the spectators in the field near Hoxton, where the soldiers exercise. Now I shall say for myself, and for myself and partners, we never had so much as one peck of wheat, or of flour, in the warehouses since they were built ; and that I never bought,

or sold, any wheat or flour at any time, or possessed any, except only in the cook's meal tub.

In saying this, I have no doubt of full credit. It is very well known that I am in a totally different line of business. *

I will now state what the rumours in general are, and in what way they appear to have arisen; and I hope to shew that they are utterly false.— The rumours seem to be reducible to the following heads:

1st. *That the Quakers are Monopolizers of Corn; and that monied men among them unite together, for the purpose of speculating therein.*

2d. *That they have meetings for this purpose.*

3d. *That a meeting-house at Horshydown, now disused and sold, was filled to the cieling with Corn.*

* When the above account was written I was inclined to state, that I once had a son, a miller, at Shalford, near Guildford, which might possibly have led to the rumour; but as my son left his mill six years ago, and has never been concerned in any business relating to corn or flour, either for himself, for me, or for any other person, since that time, I thought the mentioning of the circumstance might be deemed impertinent; however, I since find the above fact has been given out as if now existing, with an assertion that he transacted business for me.

4th. *That the Quakers in the mealing trade, who attend at Mark-lane, particularly those of Uxbridge, are Monopolizers, and hold great quantities of Corn.*

5th. *That the Quakers who attend at Mark-lane, are very numerous, and that they rule the market.*

To each of these charges I shall advert in order ; but first I will endeavour to discover, so far as it can be traced with certainty, how these rumours have arisen, which have brought an innocent body of men into undeserved reproach ; and have subjected them to the insult of uninformed and malevolent people.

In the first place, I believe it is now established beyond contradiction, that the harvest of 1799 fell far short both in point of quantity and quality. This fact has been ably stated by Arthur Young, Secretary to the Board of Agriculture, in a pamphlet entitled, ‘ The Question of Scarcity ‘plainly stated,’ &c. This circumstance alone would demand a very great increase of price ; and as it would make those who wanted corn, eager to buy, lest it should be still dearer ; and those who had corn to sell, for the same reason, backward in selling ; it will of itself account for a great part

of the extraordinary price : but other causes have concurred.

The price gradually advancing after harvest, it was not unlikely that many people should be inquiring what was the cause. It has long been a sort of custom to suppose, that corn-dealers generally contribute to this evil ; and several Quakers being in that trade ; and from their dress more marked and conspicuous on the market than others ; it was likely they should at least come in for their share of the reproach ; and I am inclined to think it also likely, they would have more than their share ; and that the most would be made of any improper conduct which any of them might fall into. It is pretty certain that there has been a jobbing in corn, by various descriptions of dealers, which has deserved blame ; and the raising of an outcry against the Quakers would be thought a good way to draw off the attention of the public from such as may have been concerned in illicit practices. This will probably be thought rather conjecture than proof ; but a late circumstance will shew, it is at least a conjecture conformable to fact. A person has lately been convicted of regrating, a partner in a certain house, not one of which is, or ever was, a Quaker ; yet it has been asserted, that a Quaker has been

convicted; and many people believed the report so much, as to come to Mark-lane, in expectation of seeing a Quaker in the pillory.* This by the way. I shall shew another instance as I go on, of the dealings of one, not a Quaker, being charged on the Quakers.

In the present unhappy state of Europe, the wonderful exertions made by our government, by land and sea, have rendered it necessary to form considerable magazines, and to make large exports to the fleets and armies. The purchases on this account, being large on the markets at Mark-lane, and to some extent round the capital, have probably given rise, however erroneously, to a notion of monopoly; and a cry being raised against the Quakers, it was very natural to place these appearances to their account.

But to me it is evident, that no Quaker or Quakers, have given any great occasion for these reports; because (as, according to the old proverb, *Murder will out*) if there had been any gross malpractice among the Quakers, plenty of people

* A woman calling this trial in the street, called it the trial of — the Quaker; and on being asked how she came to say *Quaker*, seeing no such thing was in the title-page, said that a person had given her a shilling to cry it — the Quaker.

would have been ready to make it appear; and yet nobody has pretended to establish any such single fact.

The rumour however is set a going, and being so, it has been much spread by means of a certain daily paper called, *The Morning Advertiser*.

I have not a file of that paper, but I recollect a number of paragraphs grossly reflecting on the Quakers: the following appeared under the date of 26th October, 1799.

‘It is said that the chief monopolizers of corn at present are the Quakers. We can hardly believe it possible that a set of people, who receive such indulgence in the state, and who profess the purest principles of benevolence and brotherly love, should be guilty of any measures leading to misery and oppression. Whoever the real monopolizers are, we hope they will be branded with public infamy, and have their iniquitous expectations frustrated in the end.’

There is certainly something insidious in this paragraph: it affects tenderness and disbelief of the fact; but it will appear by other paragraphs, that this was only a cover for the shaft.

Besides the paragraphs which preceded this, other insertions of an injurious tendency have since appeared, one of which will hereafter be noticed. * It is very unfortunate for the Quakers, that the Editor should have encouraged these insinuations ; because this very paper is that which goes to most of the public houses in London, and there meets a set of readers, many of whom read little else, and are prevented by their occupations, from making an accurate inquiry into the assertions they find in it.

On the appearance of the foregoing, I called at the office, accompanied by a friend who is not concerned in any trade, but who had been grossly insulted in consequence of the prevailing surmises. I reasoned with the Editor on the injustice of the charges ; and offered a paragraph to counteract the mischief, which was accordingly inserted. I asked for proofs, but could get none ; it being only urged that the subject was spoken of in every company, and that if I would walk into the market at Uxbridge, I might see the bargains made there. Of Uxbridge I shall say something, further on.

* I do not say that the Editor is the author of any of these, nor can I indeed conceive a reason why he should desire to hurt us.

I am now to speak to the charges, which I hope to do satisfactorily, though as it is evidently difficult to prove a negative, it is more reasonable that our accusers should be put on proving, than that we should be obliged to disprove, them.

1st. That the Quakers are Monopolizers of Corn; and that monied men among them unite together, for the purpose of speculating therein.

Since these reports have been in circulation, I have made diligent inquiry, and I have not been able to discover that any one Quaker singly, or any Quakers jointly, who do not usually deal in corn or flour, have either bought or sold, or held in their possession, corn or flour, during this or the last year. All the purchases and sales made at Mark-lane, are recorded at the Mansion-house. It may be seen there, that the Quakers who buy or sell corn or flour, are farmers, millers, corn-factors, flour-factors, or bakers.

The principal corn-factors at Mark-lane, not Quakers, must know who deal in corn or flour; and they know, I believe, that no Quakers concern themselves with buying or selling corn or flour, except only those whose business it is.

As to monied men among the Quakers uniting together to speculate in corn, I disbelieve it wholly. I have a pretty general knowledge of the society in and about London, and I am confident none are so concerned, and I challenge any person to make out a single case. Any communication on this subject, stating such a circumstance, will be readily attended to, and answered; provided the name of the person communicating such information be given. Anonymous applications must not expect attention.

2nd. *That they (the Quakers) have Meetings for this purpose.*

If there be no such practice, there can be no need of meetings. Those who know any thing about our meetings, know this to be a most absurd and wicked assertion; and those who do not know what our meetings are for, may be amply informed *gratis*, if they please, by asking any Quaker to give them the pamphlet called, *A Summary, &c.* *

3d. *That a Meeting-house at Horshydown, now disused and sold, was filled to the cieling with corn.*

* A Summary of the History, Doctrine, and Discipline of Friends. Phillips, George Yard, Lombard Street. Price 3d.

This report sufficiently shews, that when the minds of people are set afloat, they can believe any absurdity. The purchaser of the house, immediately on hearing the rumour, very prudently ordered the doors to be set open for several days, to give all passengers an opportunity of seeing, for themselves, the empty house.

4th. *That the Quakers in the mealing trade, who attend at Mark-lane, particularly those of Uxbridge, are Monopolizers, and hold great quantities of Corn.*

I have already said that the Quakers at Uxbridge were alluded to at the office of the Morning Advertiser. It since appears that some were probably had in view who had been mistaken for Quakers, but who were not such; for in this paper, under the date of the 16th February, is a long letter, signed 'One who is neither a Quaker or a Miller;' in which are these assertions:

'That of the quantity of mealing business done at Uxbridge, one house, which is not a Quaker's, does as much as all the Quakers put together.

'That the stock of those other persons who are not Quakers, is sometimes much greater than the stock of all the Quakers in that town.

‘ That the stock of the Quakers is such only as
 ‘ is indispensably necessary for the supply of their
 ‘ customers, in the usual course of their trade.

‘ That this accumulation of stock is so far from
 ‘ being a cause of the present high price of bread,
 ‘ and so an injury to the public, that the public
 ‘ are most essentially benefited by it; for the
 ‘ known fact is, and it can be proved, that the en-
 ‘ terprising spirit of that other house, viewing the
 ‘ probable scarcity of bread corn in this country,
 ‘ has this very season actually filled its granaries,
 ‘ not from the barns of their surrounding neigh-
 ‘ bours, but from the stores of foreign states. It
 ‘ is well known that the gentlemen alluded to,
 ‘ have, on their own private account, imported
 ‘ into this country considerable quantities of corn
 ‘ from Dantzick, and other foreign parts, which
 ‘ has a regular expenditure in the course of their
 ‘ trade. A candid and discerning public will judge
 ‘ then, whether replenishing our granaries with
 ‘ wheat, by those means, makes men objects of
 ‘ aversion or admiration, or whether they deserve
 ‘ our praise or our blame. I will not hesitate to
 ‘ place them among the benefactors of mankind.’

The insertion of the foregoing served however
 as an introduction to the old tone; for in the same

paper, on the 21st, is another long letter, signed W. H. in which, with some levity, the Quakers are again mentioned, and jeeringly termed, 'the harmless and unoffending Quakers, the honest Quakers.' and then the writer says, 'I believe it will require talents far superior to those of your correspondent, to impress upon the public mind the idea "That a few individuals, grasping into their own hands the necessary supplies of life, must eventually tend to general benefit."'

The last sentence is marked as a quotation, but it appears to be invidiously altered.

What follows also shews a disposition to disseminate the favourite topic. It is, 'And of this I am persuaded, that some of your readers, as well as myself, will be at a loss to conceive how those men, who, with granaries well replenished, daily enhance the price of their commodities, to the danger of general starvation, may, without hesitation, be placed amongst those who are termed the benefactors of mankind.'

The authors of the foregoing letters I know not; but a disposition is observable, in the latter, to

inculcate the idea of real monopoly. * Arthur Young's pamphlet, already mentioned, sufficiently accounts for the deficiency of corn; the inquiries made on behalf of government also abundantly account for it; and it is the opinion too of persons who understand the subject well, that a monopoly of corn is impossible: but leaving this, let us see what is really the conduct of the Uxbridge millers, and of the Quakers in particular.

We know that Uxbridge lies in a country where much corn is grown, and the river there affords excellent means for grinding. It is said that London requires on an average about 20,000 sacks of flour for one week's consumption: it must then be a great accommodation to the capital, to have such markets, and such mills and millers, in its neighbourhood. Such abound in all the country round, and yet we have seen in times of drought, and in times of frost, there has been some alarm from the apprehension of wanting their aid. Whence then arises this disposition to abuse a use-

* The attentive reader will see that the references in W. H.'s letter, to that signed 'Neither a Quaker or a Miller,' have nothing to do with the Quakers at all, the writer of the last mentioned letter having, in the part here alluded to, only spoken of 'that other house;' and also, that W. H. does not *prove* any thing against that House, but evidently begs the question.

ful body of men, only because the article they prepare is scarce and dear? I have not heard that any charge bearing the appearance of unfair trading, much less of monopoly, has been made out against any miller at Uxbridge. As to the Quakers, I have inquired minutely, and am well assured that their trade is carried on as fairly as any trade is in London. They buy corn at their own market, and at other markets near hand; besides this, they are obliged to buy at Mark-lane. What they buy is ground, and the bulk of the flour is sent to the bakers and to the factors in London. All this is just as it should be; but a notion is inculcated, that they amass large stocks of corn, and keep it back. On the contrary, the stocks of these very men, the Quakers at Uxbridge, have been less than usual during the year past, and oftentimes less than was necessary to secure work for their mills, and flour for their customers. Now this is a fact of which I am satisfied by inquiry; and any person whatever may be satisfied in the same way. Is any further proof possible? *

* It has since appeared that a further proof was possible; as may be seen by the following Certificate, which has been inserted in several Papers.

Uxbridge, 26th of August, 1800.

In consequence of several illiberal paragraphs which have

5th. *That the Quakers who attend at Mark-lane are very numerous, and that they rule the market.*

lately appeared in the public Papers, particularly one in the *Ledger* of the 18th inst. asserting that a Quaker, one stage from town, on the western road, had then 6000 quarters of wheat by him, we, the undersigned, considering it a duty to the Public, and an act of justice to the people alluded to in such paragraphs, to contradict such inflammatory assertions, have this day examined the Mills and Warchouses of *John, Samuel, & Wm. Hull*, and *Thomas & John Bailey*, the only Mealmen belonging to the Society commonly called Quakers, resident in this town; and we do assure the Public, (and we are sorry to observe it,) that those several Mealmen have not altogether a stock of more than 200 quarters of wheat; and, from the observations we have been enabled to make, (for their Mills and Premises are open at all times of the day for the inspection of any respectable neighbour,) we do not believe, they have, for a very considerable time past, had a larger quantity of grain than was necessary to work the Mills for the supply of their customers.

JOHN THONGER, }
RICHARD DAVIES, } *Chapel Wardens.*

JOHN R. BACKHURST, *Overseer.*

Witness,

T. MILLS, *Vicar.*

THOS. EBEN. BEASLEY, *Dissenting Minister* }
JOHN HODDER, *Attorney at Law* } *Uxbridge.*

JOHN NASH, *Constable.*

That the Quakers are not the most eminent among the corn-factors, flour-factors, or millers who attend that market, is a fact well known: that they are numerous is true, and a good reason for it will presently be given. Their influence in the market must undoubtedly be in proportion to their dealings. Now on examining the returns at the Mansion-house, it was found that the whole of their dealings amounts to about a tenth of the business done at Mark-Lane; but there appeared considerable transactions of some who had, from inattention, been mistaken for Quakers. I only note this for the guidance of any who may choose to examine the returns, and not because I have any blame to lay on such as have been so mistaken. The decided minority of the Quakers' dealings at that market is all I am to prove; and as the smallness of their influence on the price follows of course, I trust that nothing more need be said on this head. If it should be alleged that they may buy and sell, not in their own names, but by means of factors who are not Quakers; it may be answered that, on the other hand, it is certain much of that which is bought and sold by the Quakers is on account of other persons.

I could recite a number of stories which have been circulated, and which, on inquiry of the parties reporting them, have been disproved, or acknowledged to be groundless. Anonymous letters have been sent to the Lord Mayor, the absurdity of which was so glaring, that they were deemed by the worthy magistrate undeserving of notice. In one instance however, where a flour-factor was charged with holding such quantities of flour as endangered his warehouses, I myself took the trouble to examine, and found the report utterly false.*

I have mentioned that there was a reason why there are so many Quakers employed in these trades, compared with the smallness of their whole number. I conceive it to be, that the employment of a miller is an agreeable one to any man disposed to seriousness, rural life affording more opportunity for retirement and recollection than most trades will admit of. I know several Quakers now in the trade, of whom I could speak well, if it were proper. To do so of the deceased is not exceptionable; and, to name only two or three, Benjamin Kidd of Godalming,

* It has since been with equal falsehood reported that this same person was arrested by order of Government, had absconded, &c.—a very cruel attempt to injure a fair trader.

Thomas Finch of Brentford, and Thomas Hull of Uxbridge, were men of exemplary lives, well esteemed of their neighbours, and a credit to the society of Quakers.

It should be remembered too, that the church, the state, and all the numerous offices under government, afford no provision for such as refuse the taking of an oath, and a conformity to the national worship. Quakers have few means of obtaining a livelihood but by trades and manufactures, and if in following these, some of them are examples of industry, they ought not to be despised on that account. It is acknowledged that labour and industry are the support of a state; for this, and for their quiet behaviour in every situation, the government has thought it right to indulge and protect them.

It is also, I believe, true, that in no religious society there is more, if so much, care exercised, to prevent misconduct; and we have reason to hope that this care is often exerted with success. There is a yearly inquiry made whether the members of the society are 'just in their dealings.' Is it likely then that we should countenance such things as have been reported of us? I put in a

claim, as an old and well-known tradesman, to be credited in asserting, that we hold such doings in abhorrence.

I now conclude with observing, that nothing could be more unexpected to me, than an apprehension of duty to defend myself and friends in this manner. It appears to me but common justice we should be defended against defamation; and I have apprehended it due to the candid public, to prevent them from entertaining in their minds stories so unworthy of the Quakers.

ROBERT HOWARD.

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London, 24th of 7th Month, 1800.

P O S T S C R I P T.

IT should seem that the foregoing pages have either not yet come into the hands of all those by whom it is desirable they should be perused ; or that many persons have not chosen to be convinced of the falsehood of the reports which they controvert ; for on the 18th Instant, as is well known, the premises of myself and partners were attacked: Having previous notice of the hostile visit, our workmen were retained, both through my own precaution, and by desire of the magistrates ; who also recommended that they should remain within the premises. This I enjoined them to observe, unless they should be called out by the constables. I left the place at Eight o'Clock ; the onset was at Ten ; and what occurred afterwards, in repelling the assailants, arose entirely from the zeal of the workmen. Surely every candid reader will admit the injustice and cruelty of accusations unsupported by proof, or even by probability. If any one can prove there is among us any forestalling or monopoly, let him come forward and do it : but, if there be left a spark of generosity in the breasts of Englishmen, let vague and general aspersions be discouraged.

The sufferings of the poor are indisputably grievous, and ought to engage the sympathy of all such as have it in their power to contribute to their relief in any way; but it is doing them no kindness to persuade them, or to suffer them to remain persuaded, that they languish under the operation of a pretended system of monopoly on the part of the Quakers, which, though many have dared to assert it, has no foundation in fact.

R. H.

30th 9th mo. 1800.

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London: Printed by W. Phillips, George Yard, Lombard-Street.

